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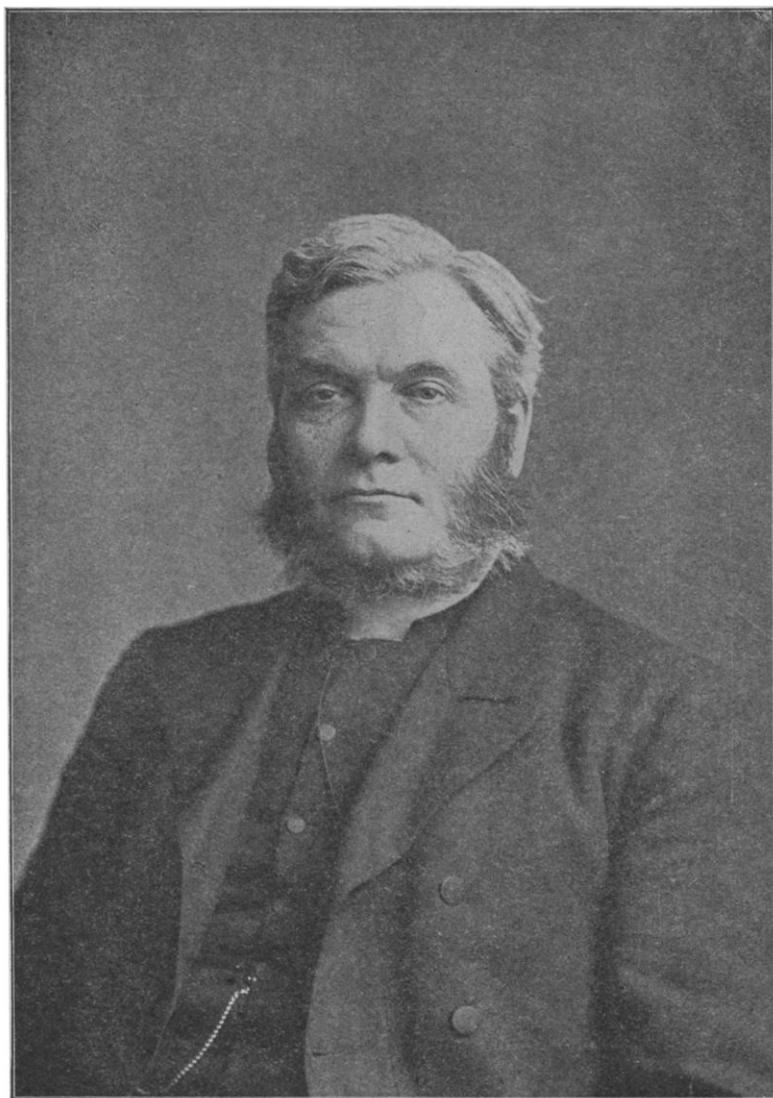
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NUMBER I

THE REWARD OF THE PROPHET.

A FUNDAMENTAL conception of Christianity is the idea that God out of his love for men gives to them gratuitously the greatest blessings. He bestows these blessings when men do not deserve them, and in amount more than they can ever deserve. The universe is all his to do with it as he has planned. Mankind is his chief care; in mankind he accomplishes his highest purposes. Infinite resources are at his command, and he uses them all to bring men step by step into a perfect manhood. Love prompts him to give freely to his children; for, as Jesus has shown, God is a Father, and he acts in a fatherly way toward men. A father does not time or measure his kindness to his children by their desert; rather, he is always bestowing upon them the greatest blessings to increase their happiness and well-being. In this way also God deals with men.

It is no wonder that from the first the principle of "justification by faith" found a welcome. Paul gave this principle its technical name, but Jesus himself had taught the principle quite as strongly and clearly in maintaining that righteousness was essentially of the heart, the attitude of man toward God. Suppose we were shut down to receiving only those blessings which we could earn! Despair has always resulted when men have thought that God deals with them upon a *quid pro quo* basis. The joy and power of Christianity lie in the fact that it reveals to us a basis of love in God's treatment of men as against a basis of desert. Jesus stated this principle with great force in his parable of "The Laborers in the Vineyard." On a



REV. MARCUS DODS, D.D.,
Professor of New Testament Interpretation at New College, Edinburgh.

commercial basis to justify the action of the owner of the vineyard is impossible. From a business point of view the man who works one hour in a day has no right to receive a compensation equal to that of the man who has worked the entire day. But Jesus chose this illustration precisely for the purpose of showing how different the basis of treatment is in the relation of God to men. The salvation which God has provided is more than any man can earn, and is therefore more than an adequate compensation even to him who deserves the most.

Not, of course, that God bestows his blessings indiscriminately, regardless of what men are or how they act. The plan of God for a perfect humanity necessitates that his blessings shall be bestowed upon those who will to accomplish this high divine purpose, those who choose to co-operate with him to this end. But when the individual has committed himself to this kind of life, it is then possible for God to secure to him the highest well-being, and to bestow upon him gratuitously the greatest blessings. So parents deal with children, giving to those who are obedient, earnest, and growing the largest opportunities and assistance possible.

People have sometimes thought of "rewards" in a very crude way. The term is used in a few passages of the New Testament *THE REWARDS* (e. g., Luke 6:23, 35; 1 Cor. 3:8, 14; 9:17 f.) with *PROMISED IN* reference to God's blessings, and it is easy to misunderstand *THE GOSPEL* what is meant if one does not clearly grasp the principle of God's loving gifts. As a matter of fact, the term "rewards" finds an occasional Christian use because it was a customary technical term in Judaism. The Jew counted his obedience to the law meritorious and deserving of recompense. This recompense he called his "reward;" it was what he earned, and he took pride in thinking that he had earned it. So this term "reward" was made to do service in the gospel message, but with as different a content as in the case of other Jewish terms, such as "the kingdom" and "the Messiah."

Even to this day, "reward" in common parlance is the counterpart of desert; it is that recompense which is earned by the individual. But our relations to God are not of a commercial kind.

The family relation, that of parent to child, is the truest analogy to indicate God's relation to men. He constantly gives us more than we have earned, does for us more than we can deserve. And what he gives and does is not a reward in the ordinary sense, but a free gift. Christianity does not promise a series of rewards scaled according to varying merits, and paid by God to men according to what they have earned. Jesus' teaching, Paul's teaching, all true conceptions of the gospel, are opposed to *quid pro quo* rewards.

These ideas will assist us in interpreting one of Jesus' most striking and significant sayings: "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward." This *THE REWARD OF THE PROPHET* teaching is recorded in Matt. 10:41, not elsewhere, although Luke (10:16) has a parallel passage to that in which Matthew's verse is found. In order to understand this saying of Jesus, one needs to consider: (1) Who is a prophet? (2) What is a prophet's reward? (3) What is it to receive "a prophet in the name of a prophet"? (4) How can one who is not a prophet receive the reward of a prophet?

Who, then, is the prophet? He is the man who speaks forth truth which is of value to humanity. He is one who finds and brings *WHO IS THE PROPHET?* a divine message from God to men. He makes God and God's will known to men. He leads men to right thinking and right living. Incidentally he may be a predictor of specific future events, but that was never the chief function of the prophet. His task was to elevate the religion and the morality of his countrymen and his age. In modern terminology we have no "prophets;" the term pertains only to the past. But in fact we have our prophets, no less than previous centuries. We call them by other names. Every person, however trained, or however occupied, who discovers and expresses to his fellow-men the facts and the truths of life which promote the highest human well-being, is in reality a prophet. And it is to such men that we are indebted for our light, our inspiration, and our progress.

What, now, is the reward that the prophet receives? Is it a stipend which some group of persons about him contributes to his

WHAT DOES THE PROPHET RECEIVE FOR HIS WORK ? support? That is a transient matter, and certainly is not what Jesus had in mind in speaking of a prophet's reward. Rather, that reward is the joy, blessing, and growth which result from his own high ideals and from his service to the world. It is the fulfilment of God's purpose in himself, and in others. The spiritual joy of assisting to bring in the reign of love, righteousness, and peace is a reward beside which human and earthly rewards are insignificant. The prophet works to enthrone truth and goodness; his recompense is to see truth and goodness being enthroned by his labors. He grasps the facts and the principles of life, he embodies them in himself, he gives them effectively to his fellow-men; thereby he achieves personal character and worth, thereby he upbuilds the kingdom of God. The reward which the prophet receives is thus the satisfaction of accomplishing God's will by the promotion of the perfect humanity toward which mankind moves.

MAY OTHERS RECEIVE A PROPHET'S REWARD ? Jesus promises that one who is not a prophet may receive the reward of a prophet. Yet not every person who is not a prophet may receive a prophet's reward, but only he who "receives a prophet in the name of a prophet." What is it to "receive a prophet in the name of a prophet"? Obviously, it is to show a real appreciation of him who speaks forth God's truth, recognizing that he is the bearer of the divine message. He who appreciates the prophet's message, and honors the prophet for his message, is one who has already entered into true sonship with his Heavenly Father, and is therefore in a condition to receive God's blessings. The man who knows goodness when he sees it, and does it sincere homage, is the essential equal of the prophet. It may not be within the power of such a man to be a discoverer or a public herald of truth—there are limitations of individual ability and individual circumstances; but any sincere man can recognize truth and goodness in others, and reverence and assist them in their work.

The world is always in need of prophets. But there is equal need of those who will appreciate prophets, understand their message, and promote their mission. The two classes of men are com-

plemental, and the reward of the one is the reward of the other. The prophet may *seem* to earn a larger reward than the obscure man because of his larger and more conspicuous service. But the reward which the prophet receives is not apportioned to his desert; it is infinitely beyond the most that he could earn. Once more we must attend to the teaching of "The Laborers in the Vineyard," that God rewards men not on a commercial basis, but by giving to every man who will receive it a full salvation. Men cannot therefore boast of having merited the blessings which God has given them, however much they may have accomplished for him. "It is my will to give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? or is thine eye evil, because I am good?" In God's loving plans for men he bestows his blessings freely upon all who become true sons, whether their lives be great or small, whether their services to the world be conspicuous or obscure. He who receives a prophet because he is a prophet, in homage to him and his message, is fit to receive a prophet's reward.